DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 331 648 RC 017 673

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TITLE Assessing Community Viability: Design and Methodology.
PUB DATE Feb 90
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Rural Sociological Association (Little Rock, AR, February 3-7, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Characteristics; *Community Leaders; Leadership; Research Design; *Research Methodology; *Rural Areas; Rural Sociology; *Social Science Research
IDENTIFIERS *Community Viability; *Missouri (Northwest); Small Towns

ABSTRACT

Assessing community viability with multiple-indicators (including education) is a necessary step in creating effective leadership in rural communities and schools. As part of a larger study of the effects of leadership patterns on community viability, this report examines the procedure for measuring community viability within the socio-geographic field, and for identifying community leaders. All 17 incorporated places in northwest Missouri with populations between 1,000 and 2,500 were identified for study. These small towns have traditionally been centers of rural areas and have some similarities in socioeconomic environment. An index of viability was developed based on five indicators: (1) percent change in population from 1970 to 1980; (2) percent change in high school enrollment from 1977/78 to 1987/88; (3) per capita sales tax receipts for 1987; (4) presence of 8 selected business services; and (5) presence of 7 selected health services. The 17 communities were ranked on each indicator, and each community's average rank was its viability score. A position-reputation method was used to select community leaders. In each community, a comprehensive list was compiled, naming persons in position in government, schools, businesses, professions, and social, service, or religious organizations. Informants from 7 categories then identified the 15 top leaders in each community. Generally, leaders had deep roots in the community and were in professional, managerial, or farm operator occupations. However, leader profiles differed substantially among communities. Analyses of these differences will take place in the next phase of this research. (SV)

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ASSESSING COMMUNITY VIABILITY: DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

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Presented at the annual meetings of the Southern Rural Sociological Association. Little Rock, Arkansas, February 3-7, 1990.

RC017673

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Assessing Community Viability: Design and Methodology

Our goal is to determine the relationship between leadership patterns and viability of rural communities. Our approach is a comparative analysis of communities within a socio-geographical field. The field consists of 17 northwest Missouri counties. It is an area of family farms and some light manufacturing. The largest place in the area is about 13,000 population.

Within the area, we identified, for study, all the incorporated places with populations between 1,000 and 2,500. There were 17 such places. The framework for data generation and analysis depends upon assessing differences in viability of these places. My discussion deals with the rationale for community selection, the procedure for identifying more and less viable communities within the socio-geographic field, and the selection of leaders in the communities.

The common field provides some degree of control of the socio-economic environment. Settlement patterns, political structures, and economies are similar. In addition, in our selection of communities for analysis, a more precise size control is imposed. However, we do not claim identity among the communities in the specifics of services, employment, ethnicity, service-hinterland relationships and other socio-economic factors. To the contrary, we seek to discover differences in communities that account for differences in viability. Our present emphasis in this explanation is to identify differences in leadership patterns.

Selection of places in the 1,000 to 2,500 population range was deliberate. Places of this size have significant resources and have developed substantial infrastructures. They have traditionally been centers of rural communities. To confirm this judgement, all of the places selected in the study area have a high school and a weekly newspaper. At the same time, these places struggle to maintain a viable economy and basic services as they compete with larger regional centers and with each other. Symbolically, merchants in these places complain of the Wal-Mart effect on consumer patterns.

Our underlying hypothesis is that human actors, as they interact and organize, affect outcomes--in this case, the viability of their communities (Logan and Molotch, Urban Fortunes. Ballard, Hoskins and Copp, 1981). We, of course, are aware that extra-local factors influence community destinies,

but we also contend that communities, through their actors, affect outcomes. Our efforts are directed toward identifying differences in social relationships in more and less viable communities in the study area.

The first task, then, and the one that I deal with here is the identification of more and less viable communities.

"A viable rural community is one that preserves a degree of local control and responds to the needs of community members, wh[illegible] relating effectively to institutions of the larger society." (Hassinger et al. 1988 p. 162). A viable community should provide basic everyday services in the areas of education, finance (i.e., banking), communications, health (primary health services), basic consumer goods (food, hardware, clothing). It should also maintain a stable or growing population base.

Our strategy was to develop an index of viability, based on objective criteria, for each of the 17 places in the study area. The selection of items for the index was based on correspondence to the conceptual definition of viability, as well as the quality and availability of data. We ruled out county-wide data because several of the counties had more than one of the centers. Furthermore, county data probably are not appropriate for community analysis. Saenz and Colberg (1988:339) found that the communities they studied and the surrounding areas (the remainder of the counties) were "substantially different with regard to their sustenance activities." Only limited use was made of census data because at the time the research was undertaken, the data were almost a decade old.

Five indicators of community viability were used: percent change in the population from 1970 to 1980; percent change in high school enrollment from 1977/78 to 1987/88; per capita sales tax receipts for the year 1987; a business service score based on the presence or absence of 8 selected businesses; and a health service score based on the presence or absence of 7 selected health services. The 17 communities in the study were ranked on each of the indicators. The ranks on the five indicators were averaged for each community and the ranks of the averages were employed as the communities' viability score (**Table 1**).

Eight businesses were used for the business service score; a point was given for each of the following businesses: bank, eating place, hardware store, clothing store, hotel/motel, drug store, farm machinery dealership, automobile dealership. It should be noted that the first two services did

not discriminate among the communities because those services were present in all of them. The items were retained because the index might be useful in the future for places with simpler service patterns. The scores ranged from 2 - 8.

The health service scores were generated in the same way as the business service scores. The following health services were used: MD or DO in family or general practice; nursing home: ICF (Intermediate Care Facility); Dentist; 2 or more MDs or DOs; Medical specialty other than family practice; hospital; nursing home: SNF (Skilled Nursing Care). All of the communities had the first health service; the scores ranged from 1 to 7.

Ranks of the communities on the several objective indicators are shown in Table 1. Communities with high average ranks (1 being the highest) are regarded as more viable. Communities at the extremes in the array of viability were selected as the sites for comparative studies. A population control was imposed by selecting a high and a low viable community from communities in the size range 1,000 to 1,500 and a second set from 2,000 to 2,500. After the original selections, it was learned that a substantial development by an outside agricultural business was imminent in the 1,000 to 1,5000 place of low viability. The decision was to retain the community in the study and add another in the same category.

The design for comparative analysis is shown in **Figure 1**.

The measure of community viability has not been validated. As we work in these communities, however, it appears that objective criteria did differentiate between communities of higher and lower viability, at least at the extremes.

We used a position-reputation method to select leaders (Trounstine and Christensen, 1982). The strategy was to obtain a comprehensive list of persons in each community who held positions in organizations, public offices or committees, businesses, religious groups, educational organizations, professions, and any other identifier of potential leadership. The list was to be inclusive, taking in persons in the

hinterlands as well as the trade centers. A 13-page instrument was used to record the names using the following categories:

A. Civic and service clubs and similar organizations
B. Fraternal, social clubs, and veterans organizations
C. Senior citizens organizations
D. Recreation and youth organizations
E. City government]
F. County government and state or national officials residing in the community
G. Schools and other educational institutions
H. Agriculture related positions
I. Financial Organizations (banks, insurance, real estate, other)
J. Major Businesses (non-retail and service)
K. Major Retail and Service Businesses
L. Community Development Associations/Industrial Development Boards. (complete roster of boards)
M. Newspaper and other media
N. Voluntary services, examples volunteer fire department, volunteer ambulance service
O. Health, Welfare and Eleemosynary organizations
P. Cultural organizations
Q. Churches and religious groups
R. Professionals in practice: physicians, lawyers, dentists, veterinarians, chiropractors, other
S. Persons of influence who do not hold offices or occupy positions in organization we have identified

Informed people in the communities helped us with this exercise. In county seat communities, county extension personnel were especially helpful; they often had lists of organizations and their incumbent officers. This was a rather easy task; it is not difficult to find knowledgeable people in places this size. The number of position-holders identified ranged from 125 in Brian to 187 in Simon (Winder 141, Price 168, Gale 180).

The next step was to have informants in each community select leaders. In each community, informants represented the following 7 areas: senior citizen/community tradition, business, agriculture, education, newspaper,

government agencies, and religion. In each community, two of the informants were women. The informants were asked to identify 15 top leaders (persons who can get things done) from the assembled list of position-holders. From the 15 selections, informants identified the 5 most influential leaders, and then the next 5 most influential leaders. The top 5 leaders were scored 3 points, the second 5, two points, the remaining 5, one point. The points awarded by the seven informants in each community were summed for position-holders and 15 persons with the highest scores were declared the leaders of the respective communities. Ranges of scores qualifying persons as leaders were as follows: Brian, 5 - 15; Winder, 6 - 20; Price, 6 - 16; Simon, 4-16; Gale, 4 - 18. The numbers of women identified as leaders were: Brian, 2; Winder, 3; Price, 1; Simon, 0; Gale, 6. Only one of the women leaders was ranked in the top 5 by other leaders; in that case, she was ranked number one.

The substantive data for this study comes from interviews with the leaders in the 5 communities. The interviews were conducted by the five people on this program (as were the other phases of the research). Interviews were from 1 1/2 to 2 hours in length; there were no refusals.

It is not my intention to present detailed substantive data on leaders, others will do that. Generally leaders had deep roots in the community (two-thirds were born in the county or an adjacent county); the median years lived in the community was 34, range 3 - 80; median years of education, 16 years; 93 percent of the leaders were or had been (if retired) in professional, managerial or farm operator occupations; the median age was 46 years. There were substantial differences among communities in the profiles of leaders. The analyses and interpretation of these differences within the design-frame is the business of this phase of our research effort.

Appendix Table 1

Viability Scores of Seventeen Missouri Commmunities

Place		Col 1	Col 2	Col 3	Col 4	Col 5	Col 6	Col 7
Community- A		2	9	6	1	2	4.0	2
Community- (B)	Brian	17	11	16	13	6	12.6	17
Community- (C)	Gale	3	5	1	1	6	3.2	1
Community- (D)	Winder	8	7	8	1	6	6.0	5
Community- E		10	13	17	16	6	12.4	15/16
Community- F		12	4	15	1	3	7.0	7
Community- G		6	15	11	13	6	10.2	12
Community- H		5	6	2	7	1	4.2	3
Community- I		1	8	4	7	14	6.8	6
Community- J		4	17	3	17	17	11.6	14
Community- (K)	Price	14	10	12	7	14	11.4	13
Community- L		13	2	5	13	3	7.2	8
Community- M		7	3	7	1	6	4.8	4
Community- (N)	Simon	11	16	14	7	14	12.4	15/16
Community- O		16	1	10	7	3	7.4	9
Community- P		9	12	13	7	6	9.4	11
Community- Q		15	14	9	1	6	9.0	10

Col 1 - Percent population change 1970-1980

Col 2 - Per capita sales tax revenue 1987

Col 3 - Percent change in high school enrollment (4 grades) school years 1977/78-1987/88

Col 4 - Retail business score (based on presence or 8 selected businesses)

Col 5 - Medical service score (based on presence or absence of 7 selected medical services)

Col 6 - Average rank, sum of the ranks divided by five

Col 7 - Community Viability Scores - ranks of the average ranks

Figure 1

Design for Comparative Analysis

Population	High Viability	Low Viability
1,000 - 1,500	Winder Index Score = 5	Brian Index Score = 17 Price Index Score = 13
2,000 - 2,500	Gale Index Score = 1	Simon Index Score = 15

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